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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/12): "GAZA SIEGE - PRELUDE TO  
INVASION"

Please note that only Al Quds and Al Ayyam resumed print today.

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Main Stories:  
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Al Quds leads with news that Israel again closed Gaza crossings after they were briefly opened on December 11 to allow for the entry of cash and humanitarian goods. Al Ayyam's front page covers the same news and runs a lead photo of Gazans crowding around ATM machines, while Al Quds' front page shows a photo of a very happy Gazan with a fist full of cash. Israel allowed \$25 million to be transferred to Gaza banks and allowed for the entry of 55 trucks carrying humanitarian assistance, reporting notes. The papers add that the U.N. Human Rights Council urged Israel on December 11 to adopt 99 measures to improve its human rights record, including the lifting of the Gaza "siege", the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israel and a halt in settlement activities.

In an above the fold front page article, Al Quds reveals that Palestinian Authority President Abbas will pay a "farewell visit" on President Bush in Washington late this month. The paper quotes Palestinian sources, stating that it would be important for the U.S. to use the visit as an opportunity to applaud Palestinians for the role they have played in the peace process. Al Quds' front page also reports that President Bush has again delayed the relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem for another six months. Bush justified his decision in a letter to Secretary Rice as being in, "the U.S. national interest," the paper reports.

Al Quds and Al Ayyam front page December 11 statements made by the Jerusalem British Consul General calling Israeli settlements, including those in Jerusalem, illegal. He added that the U.K. is ensuring that no preference is given to the import of Israeli settlement products.

Al Ayyam's front page reports on a letter sent from Arab leaders to president-elect Obama, expressing a readiness to make peace in

accordance with the Arab peace initiative. The letter, which also gets coverage on Al Quds' front page, was signed by Saudi Foreign Minister Al Faysal and Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa. Citing Reuters and AFP, the paper discloses that the letter was handed to one of Obama's political advisors a few days ago. In a front page item, Al Quds and Al Ayyam cite Israeli daily Haaretz in reporting that president-elect Obama will offer Israel a nuclear protection umbrella in return for the acceptance of a nuclear Iran. Under that plan, any Iranian nuclear attack on Israel would immediately be followed by a destructive U.S. nuclear attack on Iran. Citing news agencies, the papers also reveal that Obama, during his first 100 days in office, will address Muslims from an Islamic capital, most probably Rabat, in an effort to improve the U.S. image in the Islamic world. Papers note that Obama will use his middle name, Hussein, when sworn in as president. Al Quds' inside page cites an Israeli daily Jerusalem Post interview published on December 11, when quoting U.S. Security Coordinator General Dayton applauding the performance of the Palestinian security forces. Dayton noted that they are a key component to the establishment of a Palestinian state and he urged Israel to, "let the training continue uninterrupted," according to reporting. Al Quds' front page quotes Palestinian Authority President Abbas telling Arab press on December 11 that no peace can be made without the release of all Palestinian prisoners in Israel. Abbas also called for a halt to settler "aggressions." The paper also front pages statements from Abbas' office denouncing Israeli Foreign Minister Livni's call for Israeli Arabs to relocate to a future Palestinian state. In related news, Al Quds runs front page quotes by Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Fayyad, stating that the key to regional security, stability and peace is an end to Israeli

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occupation and settlement activity and the guarantee of the right to self determination for the Palestinians. Al Ayyam's front page highlights Fayyad's comment that the recent EU decision to upgrade relations with Israel sends, "a negative message." Fayyad made his remarks during a December 11 ceremony inaugurating 39 development projects in northern West Bank towns. Al Quds and Al Ayyam publish the results of a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research on inside pages. The poll was conducted on December 3, 4, 5 and asserts that, "while Hamas maintains its popularity despite its boycott of reconciliation talks, and while two-thirds believe that Abbas's term ends in January 2009, three quarters of Palestinians support Abbas's call for new elections early next year if reconciliation efforts fail and if elections can be held in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip."

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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1) Regular contributor Mohammad Yaghi opines in Al Ayyam under the title, "Gaza Strip siege is a long prelude to invasion"(12/12): "This siege and the continuation of its ugliness, is a prelude it seems, to Israeli military action aimed at ending Hamas rule... Bringing about the downfall of Hamas through military force will transform it from a relatively moderate, political-religious movement into an extremist, grassroots religious organization... This is very dangerous and will not stop at the Gaza borders, but will affect the West Bank and other places in the Arab world, where Jordan and Egypt could become the stage for [related violence]."

2) Al Quds' editorial is titled, "Palestinians want freedom of movement"(12/12): "The unrelenting [Israeli] insistence on maintaining checkpoints, coupled with unprecedented settlement expansion make for a effective prescription for undermining the peace process... What is needed to boost both Israeli and Palestinian security, is to remove these checkpoints and allow for the freedom of movement for Palestinian citizens and goods, inside their homeland."

Walles